

LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF WILDLIFE & FISHERIES
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Waterfowl Population Estimates
in Louisiana's Coastal Zone Below
U.S. Highway 90 and on Catahoula Lake

Date: Coastal Zone: Nov. 2-4
Catahoula Lake: Nov. 4

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November 6, 2015

Pilot: B. Dorsa

Estimates made from Aircraft

SPECIES	SOUTHWEST	SOUTHEAST	CATAHOULA LAKE	TOTALS
MALLARD	1,000		**	1,000
MOTTLED	19,000	17,000		36,000
GADWALL	309,000	126,000	9,000	444,000
WIGEON	3,000	9,000	**	12,000
GW TEAL	68,000	34,000	**	102,000
BW TEAL	189,000	97,000	1,000	287,000
SHOVELER	105,000	21,000	1,000	127,000
PINTAIL	17,000	139,000	2,000	158,000
TOTAL DABBLERS	711,000	443,000	13,000	1,167,000
SCAUP	2,000			2,000
RINGNECKED	13,000	15,000	10,000	38,000
CANVASBACK				0
TOTAL DIVERS	15,000	15,000	10,000	40,000
TOTAL DUCKS	726,000	458,000	23,000	1,207,000
COOTS	250,000	200,000	10,000	460,000

**Estimate is less than 1,000

COMMENTS:

The estimate of 1.21 million ducks from this survey is 61% lower than last November's estimate of 3.13 million, 33% below the most recent 5-year November average of 1.81 million, and 44% lower than the long-term average of 2.15 million. This is the fourth lowest November estimate since this survey began in 1969, but the large variation between this and last November is almost certainly due to the earlier survey dates and higher temperatures prior to the survey. Fewer of all species except blue-winged teal were seen compared to 2014, and only bluewings (LTA=183,000) and shovelers (LTA=93,000) were above their long-term averages. Weather conditions in the Mississippi Flyway have not been conducive

to moving larger numbers of birds into Louisiana, and the near absence of mallards, scaup, and canvasbacks show we are still very early in the typical migration.

The distribution of ducks was skewed toward SW Louisiana, which is typical for November but is in contrast to 2014, when large numbers of ring-necked ducks in SE Louisiana skewed the total toward that region. Large concentrations of ducks were noted in the marsh of the East Cove Unit of Cameron Prairie NWR, and in the agricultural habitat north of Intracoastal City. Another large concentration was noted off the transect lines (and not counted) in the agricultural fields between Thornwell and Welsh.

On the SE Louisiana transects, ducks were especially clumped with the only large concentration seen in the marsh across the river from Venice. About 85% of the total ducks counted in southeast Louisiana were seen on that 1 line.

The 23,000 ducks counted at Catahoula Lake on this survey was far lower than the 144,000 counted last November and 154,000 counted in 2013. Recent heavy rainfall has flooded the lake to nearly 3 feet above management targets and 5 feet higher than normal water levels this time of year. That rainfall has also flooded a large acreage of agricultural and other habitat in proximity to the lake and likely contributed to substantially lower November duck use.

Habitat conditions in coastal marshes and Catahoula Lake were good to excellent prior to the recent heavy rainfall and extensive flooding. Despite drought conditions over much of the state, there was solid submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) and moist-soil production in marsh habitats, and moist-soil plant production at Catahoula Lake was the best since 2009. High water levels and turbidity precluded visibility and evaluation of SAV during this survey, but good stands were still evident in a number of locations. Water levels exceed those optimal for foraging dabbling ducks in the marsh habitat and at Catahoula Lake. However, the rainfall eased or eliminated drought conditions across the state and produced an abundance of habitat for migrating waterfowl in the agricultural regions across the coastal zone. Far above normal November amounts of shallow-flooded grain fields and pastures were noted in all locations during this survey.

The northwest and northeast Louisiana aerial surveys will be flown in the next 2 weeks because of aircraft and observer availability and the staggered opening dates for duck hunting in the West and East zones. Those results will be provided in the December aerial survey report.